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Chairman: Mr. KUKAN (Slovakia)

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AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/48/12 and Add.1, A/48/64, A/48/91, A/48/134, A/48/181, A/48/184, A/48/207, A/48/294-S/26247, A/48/299-S/26261, A/48/308-S/26295, A/48/391, A/48/444)

1. Mr. SINUNGURUZA (Burundi) said that Burundi's dual status as both a country of asylum and a country of origin had sensitized the authorities to the refugee issue and had led them to express their political will to resolve once and for all the problem of refugees from Burundi. To that end, an appeal had been made to nationals of Burundi living in exile to return to their country. In 1991 an agreement had been signed between Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Burundi, more than 50,000 of whom had returned. Unfortunately, the recent coup attempt in his country had caused ethnic divisions, thought to be permanently eradicated, to resurface, causing the exodus of hundreds of thousands of people to Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire.

2. His delegation welcomed the emergency measures taken by UNHCR to help the affected individuals and hoped that the international community would respond to the appeal by UNHCR for the necessary financial and material assistance. While recognizing that the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees did not cover persons displaced within their own country, his country hoped to receive emergency temporary assistance for the thousands of people who were living in precarious conditions.

3. That did not mean that the voluntary repatriation programme was to be abandoned; as soon as the necessary conditions had been created, refugees and displaced persons would be able to return. In that respect, he pointed out that the majority of those who had emigrated in the wake of disturbances in the northern part of the country in 1988, had returned to the country, recovered their property and received aid.

4. Mr. SACIRBEY (Bosnia and Herzegovina) expressed satisfaction at the success that had been achieved in repatriating refugees and providing humanitarian aid in Cambodia, Central America, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Noting the statement in the High Commissioner's report to the effect that humanitarian assistance could not replace political solutions, he said that political solutions alone could stem displacement and eliminate human suffering. Humanitarian assistance could only be a temporary measure.

5. The two reports of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia (A/47/635 and A/47/666) indicated that the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not a religious one and that ethnic cleansing did not appear to be the consequence of the war, but rather its goal. If the international community was to deal effectively with the refugee and humanitarian disasters in his country, it should effectively deal with the Serbian regime in Belgrade and its surrogates in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

(Mr. Sacirbey, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

6. He described the physical, psychological and logistical methods used by the Serbian regime to turn half of Bosnia's population into refugees, in open violation of Security Council resolutions and international law. In that connection, he drew attention to the recent attacks against civilians in Gorazde. In his view, the failure of the international community to implement the political solution envisaged in the Vance-Owen plan had encouraged certain elements within the Croatian forces to commit similar atrocities.

7. Events had proved that humanitarian assistance could not end the suffering of the Bosnian people. However, in the absence of a political solution, humanitarian assistance was crucial to the survival of the Bosnian people and the Bosnian State during the approaching winter. His Government was appreciative of the appeal for the former Yugoslavia by UNHCR, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme and other organizations, and urged Governments to give careful consideration to the observations and recommendations in that appeal. He expressed the hope that the donor community would recognize the urgency of the situation and respond accordingly.

8. Not all the assistance that had been sent had reached the population. There had been cases where food had been left in storage and spoilt and where blankets had been left out in the rain awaiting transport which had been blocked by Serbian forces. A firmer stand needed to be taken in the face of such abuse. He called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 770 (1992).

9. If Serb gunmen were allowed to continue their intimidation of United Nations convoys, the Organization would be viewed as impotent, and that could only encourage other criminal elements to follow suit. His delegation repeated the request made the previous year that Tuzla airport, which was situated in territory controlled by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, should be immediately opened in order to alleviate the plight of half a million Bosnian citizens in the region.

10. With regard to the sanctions currently imposed on Serbia and Montenegro, his Government understood the difficulties faced by the people, but emphasized that sanctions were meant to bring about a change in the Belgrade regime's policies. He asked why the international community legitimized that regime by including them in a forum to discuss peace, when it was war that kept them in power.

11. He denounced the Serbian practice of allowing aid to be shipped from Belgrade only to be blocked at the Bosnian border as well as the imposition of strict visa requirements which allowed convoy drivers only three entry/exits on a three-month visa.

12. In conclusion, he stated that if lasting peace was to be established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the refugee population must be allowed to return to their homes in safety and dignity. If the results of ethnic cleansing were allowed to stand, reconciliation would be difficult to achieve.

13. Mrs. SILVERA (Cuba) said that, since the drawing up of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951, the juridical phenomenon of refugees had developed very rapidly, particularly as a result of the severe economic crisis that was taking a heavy toll on the fragile structures of developing countries and worsening conflicts in those countries. Although there was some overlapping of the concepts of refugee status and asylum, they were two distinct institutions, each with its own legal and institutional framework.

14. She noted with concern that in some cases attempts were being made to implement forcible repatriation, which represented a violation of basic norms set forth in international juridical instruments. Discrimination, marginalization and violation of the fundamental rights of refugees were common in some host countries. It was particularly important that UNHCR should continue to carry out its humanitarian work in order to prevent those phenomena from occurring.

15. She explained the steps taken by Cuba to provide assistance to persons who for different reasons had settled in the country, drawing attention to the humanitarian aid provided to refugees from other Caribbean countries who had involuntarily or accidentally reached Cuban shores. Recently the case of Haitian refugees, who had been refused entry by their country of destination as well as re-entry by their homeland, had given rise to a delicate situation in which the negotiations carried out by UNHCR had resolved the situation satisfactorily. Traditionally Cuba had coped with the influx of refugees with its own resources; it was only in the case described, given the large number of refugees involved that it had decided as an exceptional measure to share the burden.

16. Her delegation considered that the international community had a duty to continue supporting the work of UNHCR so that it could maintain the level of its increasingly vital activities. On those grounds her delegation would oppose any attempt to extend the mandate of other United Nations bodies to include matters related to refugees, since it would not only undermine the equilibrium required in the Organization but might also entail the introduction of coercive measures in a purely humanitarian sphere.

17. Mr. CASTANEDO CORNEJO (El Salvador), speaking also on behalf of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, expressed great concern at the increase in the refugee populations as a result of instability arising from different types of conflicts. However, irrespective of the cause, it was essential to find lasting political solutions, complemented by humanitarian aid geared towards long-term development.

18. The triple strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions was efficient; however, its success would depend to a large extent on the participation and active cooperation of the international community, together with efforts by the parties concerned. Concerted action by the different organs of the United Nations system was essential, especially with regard to preventive diplomacy, since by stepping up development aid the causes of tension and crises which forced people to flee their native lands would be eliminated.

(Mr. Castanedo Cornejo, El Salvador)

19. The success achieved so far in the Central American region had been due in the main to the joint efforts of all parties involved in the implementation of the Concerted Plan of Action of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), namely refugee groups, participants at the conference, donors, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

20. The political will of the Central American Governments to promote firm and lasting peace in the region and build democracy in Central America - commitments undertaken at the summit meeting of Central American Presidents (Esquipulas II) - had been reflected in voluntary repatriation programmes for refugees and the return of displaced persons to their places of origin; it was reckoned that so far approximately 100,000 persons had been returned to their homeland.

21. The adoption by the Governments of Belize, Costa Rica and Mexico of national policies aimed at improving the legal situation of refugees and displaced persons, together with the support provided by UNHCR through CIREFCA programmes, had made for considerable success in the implementation of local integration programmes.

22. One such operation worthy of note was the collective repatriation of 2,400 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. The Government of Guatemala had provided land for 1,102 families, had granted them credit facilities and had encouraged the organization of development support groups. A similar programme had been carried out in Nicaragua as a result of which some 70,000 demobilized troops and members of the local population had been repatriated.

23. The signing of peace agreements between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional had enabled the repatriation of 3,200 refugees. In El Salvador considerable efforts were also being made in matters of protection and reintegration programmes, and it was expected that some 500,000 persons would be allowed to vote in the 1994 elections, which were to be supervised by the United Nations.

24. At each stage of the repatriation process, the Central American Governments had complied with the conditions agreed upon with UNHCR, by guaranteeing the physical safety and integrity of the population and the free exercise of their rights, including return to their communities of origin. Additional efforts had been made by the Governments to facilitate the return of those repatriated through the adoption of measures that ensured reintegration in the economic and social life of their homeland.

25. The results of CIREFCA had been positive, and it was to be hoped that other regions would learn from the experience. However, the process of incorporating CIREFCA in an integrated and sustainable regional development initiative, with due regard for human needs, would certainly require the continued support of the international community and the cooperation of the United Nations system. At their most recent summit meeting, the presidents of the Central American countries had urged the international community to continue supporting humanitarian and development programmes on behalf of uprooted populations.

26. Mr. Byung Yong SOH (Republic of Korea) said that in recent years the international refugee situation had worsened, primarily on account of the intensification of regional conflicts resulting from ethnic and religious disputes. The continuation of such conflicts in different regions would certainly give rise to a greater flow of refugees, which if it persisted, would have serious implications for international peace and security. A determined effort would be required on the part of the international community in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

27. Nevertheless, UNHCR had been able to assist a large number of refugees in returning to their native countries in 1992; that had been one of the major accomplishments of the United Nations in its humanitarian efforts, and bore witness to the importance of systematic coordination and cooperation between the various United Nations bodies and organizations in providing assistance to refugees.

28. The United Nations and the international community in general should strengthen collective efforts to protect human rights, foster democracy and promote the tolerance and protection of minority groups. UNHCR and the international humanitarian and relief organizations should step up their efforts to ensure that refugees were not subjected to persecution and human rights violations in their countries of origin or elsewhere. In particular, monitoring of refugee camps by UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) should be permitted so as to prevent all forms of physical maltreatment of refugees.

29. Moreover, no effort should be spared by the international community to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children. His country supported UNHCR policy on refugee women and expressed the hope that it would be successfully implemented.

30. Another matter of concern was the huge number of internally displaced persons. Since the Government of each country was responsible for such matters, he urged them to make every effort to settle such persons in a sustainable environment. The contribution of the United Nations bodies, international organizations and NGOs could prove useful in that regard. UNHCR should play a more active role in that work, particularly since such populations could become refugees without the proper attention.

31. It was only by recognizing the causes of refugee movements that workable and durable solutions could be devised, such as the forging of strategic partnerships, in particular between UNHCR and the United Nations organizations responsible for development.

32. The Republic of Korea welcomed the measures taken by UNHCR, the General Assembly and the Security Council regarding the safety of field staff.

33. Lastly, he mentioned that his country had acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol.

34. Mr. WEERAWEDPHISAI (Thailand) said his Government appreciated the work of all the participants in the recently completed repatriation of 370,000 Cambodians who had temporarily found refuge in Thailand. Voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution; repatriation of all Cambodian refugees and asylum-seekers in safety and dignity was a triumph of international goodwill.

35. Because of the extraordinary rise in the numbers of refugees, UNHCR must not be left to shoulder that burden alone since the refugee problem was the responsibility of the entire international community. Protection and assistance were closely interrelated and conducive to finding a lasting solution to the problem.

36. Since 1975, his Government had accepted 700,000 Indo-Chinese refugees. Despite the success of the repatriation of Cambodian refugees, currently 45,000 Indo-Chinese, 33,000 Laotian and 12,000 Vietnamese refugees remained in Thailand, a number which surpassed that of any other first-asylum country in East and South-East Asia. Guided by the principles of humanitarianism, his Government had, for over two decades, committed itself to the well-being of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons from neighbouring countries.

37. The Thai-Lao-UNHCR tripartite meetings were successful, but UNHCR, donor countries and development organizations had to assist in expanding the capacity of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to absorb returnees. Likewise, the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA) had orchestrated significant achievements in the repatriation of Vietnamese boat people in Thailand. His Government welcomed the convening of a meeting of the CPA Steering Committee in early 1994 to study, among other things, implementation of the Plan.

38. Repatriation and reintegration went together. When his Government had accepted thousands of refugees, it was with the understanding that their presence would be temporary and that the next step would be resettlement and repatriation to third countries. Countries of origin must assume their full responsibility in accepting the return of their citizens and reintegrating them into society. His Government urged UNHCR and the international community to provide financial support to countries such as the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia so that they might rebuild their socio-economic infrastructures and thereby ensure reintegration of the returnees.

39. Thailand had extended various forms of economic and technical assistance to help in Cambodia's reconstruction and was deeply concerned about the violence throughout Cambodia. The UNHCR mission was to remain in that country in order to prevent new flows of refugees and provide assistance and protection for those Cambodians likely to become victims of the possible renewal of hostilities.

40. Miss FERTEKLIGIL (Turkey) said that her delegation supported the High Commissioner's triple strategy of ensuring international protection, improving intervention capability in emergency situations and finding lasting solutions. If that strategy were to be supported by a consensus on the course of action to be followed at the intergovernmental level, it could offer increasingly effective solutions for the refugee problems since, as the High Commissioner had emphasized in his report, humanitarian assistance could not be a substitute for political solutions to the problems.

(Miss Fertekligil, Turkey)

41. Most current conflicts were caused by the resurgence of trends such as nationalism and racism which had been added to the root causes of mass movements of peoples. Once again, the relationship between the refugee problem and peace and stability had been demonstrated, as had the interdependence of the political, economic and social arenas. The magnitude of the challenge which the international community had to confront and the need to give its most complete meaning to "solidarity" had been made clear.

42. Constant increase in the numbers of refugees and the proliferation of emergency situations meant that the establishment of prevention strategies had assumed extreme significance. More than ever, what was needed were a global approach to the problem and better cooperation between United Nations specialized agencies themselves and other interested international entities, with lasting solutions being the ultimate goal.

43. Her delegation called attention to the voluntary repatriation programmes established by UNHCR in various regions of the world. One of the most successful had been the repatriation programme of almost 500,000 Iraqi refugees of Kurdish origin from Turkey, an operation which had underscored the need for close collaboration between the country of temporary asylum and UNHCR and other international agencies.

44. Her country, in the centre of regions where conflicts were generating movements of peoples, had accepted thousands of Bosnians and was continuing, as best it could, to extend humanitarian aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her Government was concerned by the situation in that country where thousands of people were living under terrible conditions and were continuing to abandon their homes and lands. That situation emphasized the increasingly urgent need to attend to the requirements of those people who were in mortal danger. In that regard, she welcomed the humanitarian efforts which UNHCR was continuing in the region.

45. A further reason for her Government's concern was the exodus in Azerbaijan where the number of refugees and displaced persons, caused by Armenian occupation, had reached 1 million and where the aggressor had completely destroyed the housing areas as a way of preventing the refugees' return. A political settlement of that problem had become increasingly urgent because it had assumed the characteristics of a regional conflict.

46. Her delegation supported the conclusions in document A/48/12/Add.12 on the Executive Committee's report and, in particular, welcomed the concern it expressed for women and children, the most vulnerable groups of refugees.

47. Her Government, confronted with constant population movements, had not spared any efforts, despite its limited resources, to ease the suffering of those seeking refuge. When recognizing refugee status and adopting measures for refugee protection it was necessary to maintain the procedures established in the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which could not be unilaterally interpreted as a result of new ideas about controlling illegal migration. In law, reservations were to be expressed at the time of accession to legal instruments and not in years after their entry into force because of pressure from events.

(Miss Fertekligil, Turkey)

48. In conclusion, she again expressed her concern about more and more frequent refusals to consider resettlement as a lasting solution. Turkey, as a traditional first asylum country opposed that trend which it considered contrary to the fundamental principle of the international burden-sharing of refugees.

49. Mrs. TOMIC (Slovenia) expressed her admiration for the outstanding performance of UNHCR during the last year in confronting many conflicts which had produced massive waves of migration.

50. Refugees were one of the greatest current problems, and that problem was becoming increasingly complex. Its most important causes were armed conflicts, violations of human rights and political instability, especially in situations characterized by racial, ethnic and other intolerance. When also met with economic deprivation and social imbalances, massive economic migrations were produced, and those were creating alarming problems such as racial intolerance in the host countries.

51. Her delegation supported the innovative proposals of the High Commissioner for dealing with the refugee issue and agreed that, in the long run, the only effective solution was elimination of the root causes of the problem. Humanitarian measures must be linked with political solutions to avoid the risk of implementing humanitarian aid at high costs but with limited results. The Secretary-General's report "An Agenda for Peace" offered a good basis for preventive diplomacy which was applicable also in potential cases that might produce waves of refugees.

52. UNHCR had achieved significant results in repatriating refugees and displaced persons, especially in Cambodia and Central America. None the less, long-term political stabilization and economic recovery were the only guarantees for successful reintegration.

53. Although the considerations put forward by UNHCR in justification of its position in respect of internally displaced persons were understandable, it should not be forgotten that they too were persons in need. UNHCR should therefore employ a pragmatic case-by-case approach.

54. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had caused the biggest refugee exodus in Europe since the Second World War, had not improved. The continued armed conflict and the advent of winter could produce another refugee flow and put obstacles in the way of receiving humanitarian aid. Only a lasting political solution would enable the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to return in safety and dignity to their homeland.

55. Throughout the conflict, Slovenia, a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, had accepted tens of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and either accommodated them in its 28 refugee centres or provided help in the form of food and clothing for those taken in by families from Bosnia and Herzegovina who had emigrated to Slovenia in recent decades. In addition, the refugees enjoyed the same rights to health care as citizens of Slovenia and their children had the right to attend school.

(Mrs. Tomic, Slovenia)

56. For all those reasons, Slovenia needed more financial assistance and was compelled once again to call upon other States to accept more refugees, according to the humanitarian principle of equitable sharing of the refugee burden.

57. Mr. KAYUMOV (Tajikistan) said that his country, which was taking its first steps as a subject of international law, had suffered from a war that had cost more than 20,000 lives among its citizens. In addition, 540,000 persons, i.e. 10 per cent of the population, had become refugees. Economic and social problems had also intensified: in the first half of 1993 alone, national income had dropped by 36 per cent as compared with the same period for 1992, industrial production had fallen by 30 per cent, the harvest of potatoes and other vegetables was only a third as large and there had been practically no production of many other foodstuffs. In such circumstances, Tajikistan could not cope alone with the many hardships from which it suffered.

58. Fortunately, the international community had answered its appeal for assistance. An emergency response team had been sent to his country to study the situation, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had made an urgent appeal for emergency assistance to Tajikistan in the order of $20 million: the largest donation had been received from the United States and major contributions had been made by the EEC, Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, France, Luxembourg and the Aga Khan Fund.

59. A process of voluntary repatriation of Tajik refugees had just been started in collaboration with the leadership of Afghanistan and it was hoped that a tripartite agreement in that connection would soon be signed between Tajikistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR.

60. Tajikistan was doing its utmost to provide regular assistance to the refugees but, with winter approaching, it appealed to UNHCR, all the organizations of the United Nations system and the international community to take steps to lend the Tajik refugees emergency assistance, especially in the form of foodstuffs, vital necessities and medicines. It should not be forgotten that Tajikistan had to provide for the Afghan refugees in his country.

61. In conclusion, Tajikistan fully supported the proposal of the Russian Federation for convening a conference to find ways of providing a lasting solution to the problem of refugees, displaced persons and migrants.

62. Mr. ZIMBA (Mozambique) said that there was a direct relationship between the number of conflicts and the number of refugees, since in most cases conflicts were accompanied by systematic violations of human rights and disrespect for international humanitarian law. Natural or man-made disasters, environmental degradation, extreme poverty and acute economic problems contributed to flows of refugees and made their plight even worse. The efficacy of the three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions, adopted by UNHCR, largely depended on coordination and cooperation between UNHCR, the bodies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and Governments.

(Mr. Zimba, Mozambique)

63. It was encouraging to note that UNHCR proposed to continue relief beyond its traditional areas of intervention to include internally displaced persons. The High Commissioner's appeal for more contributions to General Programmes should be supported.

64. Turning to the situation in Africa, the continent which held one third of the world's refugee population, he drew attention to the need for appropriate measures to be taken there to address social issues and to the continuing deterioration of African economies. In 1991, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity had signed a treaty establishing the African Economic Community; in addition, at their Summit Conference in Cairo, African leaders had adopted a mechanism for preventing, managing and solving conflicts in Africa. The success of those arrangements would help to solve the refugee problem, although Africa would continue to need the support of the whole international community.

65. The 10 references to Mozambique in the UNHCR report in connection with the refugee question reflected the seriousness of the situation. In only six years, 1.5 million Mozambicans had been forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, in flight from a protracted war. Currently, the Mozambican refugee problem was regarded as the biggest ever in the entire continent.

66. The war in Mozambique could not be separated from the policies of destabilization against neighbouring countries designed to discourage peoples and Governments from supporting the anti-apartheid movement. Mozambique's refugee problem was the price that the country had had to pay for supporting the international effort against apartheid. Because of its strategic geographic situation in the region, peace in Mozambique was crucial for peace and stability throughout the continent, and instability in Mozambique affected neighbouring countries.

67. Under the General Peace Agreement, signed in Rome, Mozambique had started a process of reconciliation in the country. The Agreement opened up prospects for the hope of finding a lasting solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced people. His Government, in close cooperation with UNHCR and the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, had signed agreements with neighbouring countries to guarantee the orderly and voluntary repatriation of the refugees. Under those agreements, the repatriation of Mozambicans living in Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe had begun.

68. Mozambique had started preparations for holding its first general election, scheduled for October 1994. The creation of democratic institutions would help to prevent further refugee crises. Also, the democratization of societies in the region would contribute greatly to the search for lasting solutions to those problems. Mozambique expressed its gratitude to donor countries and to its neighbours for their generosity and hospitality to the Mozambican people.

69. Mr. AL-SAIF (Kuwait) expressed his delegation's concern at the existence of 90 million refugees and 24 million internally displaced persons, constituting an international problem that could only be solved through a concerted effort by Governments, the organizations of the United Nations system and NGOs. Kuwait agreed with the High Commissioner that the causes of refugee flows throughout the world were the violation of human rights and the existence of armed conflicts. Events in southern Africa, Somalia, Iraq and former Yugoslavia confirmed that view.

70. Humanitarian assistance was not enough to solve the problem; accordingly, UNHCR needed to take preventive measures to safeguard respect for human rights.

71. Despite the problems caused by the Iraqi invasion and the subsequent deterioration of its economic and social structure, Kuwait had continued to fulfil its international commitments in regard to refugees. It had provided humanitarian assistance to refugees from southern and northern Iraq, in cooperation with the competent authorities of Turkey and Iraq. In the case of Somalia, Kuwait had provided humanitarian assistance directly and had contributed a military unit to peace-keeping operations in the field. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it had sent assistance to Sarajevo, and when it was unable to do so directly, it had provided it through governmental and non-governmental organizations in the neighbouring countries.

72. In respect of emergency situations, Kuwait, together with UNHCR and other international immigration organizations, had provided medical assistance and given asylum to those wounded in Bosnia.

73. In conclusion, he noted that Kuwait's cooperation with UNHCR arose from the conviction that humanitarian questions took precedence over political ones.

74. Mrs. ROMULUS (Haiti) said that 1993 had been one of the most tragic and ill-fated years in the experience of UNHCR. The statistics on refugees and displaced persons did not fully reflect the extent of their suffering.

75. The anarchy, coups d'état, conflicts and economic upheaval which had followed the downfall of certain systems had led to violence, which had been further aggravated by Government-fostered hatred between communities. Ethnic conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia could easily break out in other countries.

76. Somalia was going through a terrible nightmare, and her delegation urged all parties concerned to try at least to reduce the conflict to a tolerable and humane level. It was concerned, too, about the situation caused by the recent developments in Burundi, which had forced thousands of persons to take refuge in neighbouring countries which were also experiencing economic difficulties.

77. In Haiti, the bloody coup d'état of 1991 had left more than 3,000 citizens assassinated, 40,000 refugees fleeing to friendly countries and 300,000 persons forced to leave their homes in order to avoid reprisals. Repression and impoverishment could well create a flow of emigration from Haiti of

(Mrs. Romulus, Haiti)

unforeseeable proportions. Over 40,000 Haitians had risked their lives by taking to the sea in small boats. Of the survivors, the more fortunate ones had obtained refugee status, while the rest had been returned to their country without mercy.

78. Only the restoration of constitutional order in Haiti could put an end to the situation. In her opinion, the Haitian people and the international community would not tolerate a return to the arbitrary and oppressive regime of the past. There had been much negotiating, but the situation had only worsened. Paramilitary groups were terrorizing the population, and a curfew had been imposed.

79. Those problems could be dealt with only by tackling the root of the evil and finding just and lasting solutions; otherwise, despair and uncertainty would cause social crises that would exact a high toll on the international community. Her delegation invited UNHCR to continue its active participation and cooperation with the Commission on Human Rights, the Centre for Human Rights and other competent bodies and organizations. Finally, she urged donors to continue their support in order to ensure that future operations would be duly financed.

80. Mr. SAHRAOUI (Algeria) said that the unprecedented increase in the refugee population over the last few years was due, to a large extent, to the rapid political, economic and social changes that had occurred following the end of the cold war. The causes of the vast movements of refugees were to be found, at the political level, in an awakening of nationalism and of ethnic, religious and tribal tensions, as well as territorial claims, and, at the economic and social levels, in macroeconomic factors such as the deteriorating terms of trade, the debt burden or the negative social impact of structural adjustment programmes.

81. In her statement to the Executive Committee, the High Commissioner had pointed out that political settlement and economic rehabilitation were closely linked. Consequently, the international community must show more clearly its willingness to offer political and financial support for an effort that represented not only the best solution to the refugee problem, but also an investment in world and regional stability.

82. The international community had a duty not only to address the underlying causes of refugee movements but also to play a more active role in emergency situations in which survival itself was at stake. In that regard, Africa was unquestionably the most seriously affected continent in the world. His delegation endorsed the appeal made by UNHCR for more assistance to be provided to Africa and for United Nations agencies, international financial institutions and the world community to work together to help Africa.

83. There had been a time in the recent history of his own country that a large segment of the population had experienced first-hand the difficult situation of refugees; hence, Algeria was certainly willing to respond to all requests for humanitarian assistance. His country's tradition of hospitality had been evident, quite naturally, in the case of the Saharan refugees. Algeria had assumed full responsibility for that burden until such time as the United Nations plan for solving the question of Western Sahara, in collaboration with

(Mr. Sahraoui, Algeria)

the Organization of African Unity, could be implemented. His country hoped that UNHCR assistance to the Saharan refugees could be increased so as to cover a greater share of their needs.

84. Algeria was also providing humanitarian assistance to Malian and Nigerian refugees. Believing that voluntary repatriation with dignity and safety was one of the best solutions to the refugee problem, Algeria had agreed with Mali to begin implementing, in cooperation with IFAD and UNHCR, the 1993 plan of action aimed at promoting the return and reintegration of Malians. With regard to the Nigerian refugees, a protocol agreement on a plan of action for displaced Nigerians had been approved, and practical aspects were now being examined in order to ensure that the Nigerian refugees could be repatriated under the best possible conditions.

85. Mr. MARKER (Pakistan) said that the causes for the massive refugee movements must be gradually eliminated to find a lasting solution to the problem; in the last year alone, the number of refugees had increased from 18 to 19 million. Although some progress had been made in regard to the return of refugees to their countries of origin, as, for example, in Afghanistan, Mozambique, Cambodia and Central America, the refugee situations in Central Asia, the Transcaucasus, the former Yugoslavia and many parts of Africa continued to be very disturbing.

86. His Government fully endorsed the High Commissioner's three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions, and shared the view that humanitarian assistance and repatriation should be supplemented by a political and economic environment which created conditions for reconciliation, reintegration and recovery. An integrated approach should focus on promotion and protection of human rights, economic development and elimination of conflicts.

87. The increasing involvement of UNHCR in preventive and solution-oriented strategies was appropriate, but would require more resources. Refugees could not be expected to return to situations where their security was not ensured. Therefore, the durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and resettlement, rooted in national reconciliation and development, provided the most viable framework.

88. Pakistan supported the efforts of the Afghan people to achieve peace and reconciliation, which should create the necessary conditions for repatriation and rehabilitation of Afghan refugees and reconstruction of their economy, shattered by the ravages of war.

89. The Executive Committee had noted that Afghan refugees constituted the single largest refugee case-load in the world. In 1990, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan and the World Food Programme, had launched a pilot project for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. The project had been quite successful in 1992, but its progress had been seriously retarded following disturbances in Afghanistan. From May 1992 to August 1993, more than 94,000 new refugees had arrived in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan had informed UNHCR that the voluntary repatriation programme was not working because of the lack of reintegration facilities,

(Mr. Marker, Pakistan)

destruction of infrastructure in Afghanistan and dwindling international assistance. It was unlikely that 2 million refugees, the planning figure adopted by UNHCR, would be able to return to their country of origin.

90. Despite its severe economic limitations, Pakistan continued to provide assistance to the refugees. In the beginning, his country had received generous contributions from the international community, UNHCR, WFP and other international agencies, but after the signing of the Geneva Accords and the withdrawal of foreign troops, international assistance had dropped sharply.

91. UNHCR and donor countries had adjusted their contributions on the basis of very optimistic estimates anticipating a much-reduced case-load in Pakistan, but with the slow pace of repatriation and fresh arrivals, it was imperative that assistance should be increased commensurate with the case-load. The refugees must be offered greater incentives to return to their country, for example, by increasing assistance in both cash and kind and by undertaking quick-impact rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in order to create a congenial atmosphere in Afghanistan.

92. The presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan for the past 15 years had caused serious damage to the environment. According to Government estimates for 1989, over $400 million would be needed to repair some of the damage. A UNDP survey mission in 1990 had confirmed the fact that over $100 million would be needed for priority projects to be implemented over a five-year period.

93. The brutal aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina and ethnic cleansing in that country was perhaps the worst tragedy since the end of the Second World War. Hundreds of thousands of Bosnians had been forced to flee to other countries. According to UNHCR, as a result of the war in the former Yugoslavia some 4 million people currently depended on international assistance and some 2 million had become refugees and displaced persons. The international community must halt the Serbian aggression and enable the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to return to their homes in dignity and safety.

94. Pakistan wished to draw the international community's attention to the thousands of refugees from Jammu and Kashmir who had had to flee to protect themselves from the reign of terror unleashed by the Indian security forces since 1990. Those refugees looked forward to the day when they would be able to return to their homeland and exercise their right to self-determination through a fair and impartial plebiscite, as mandated by the Security Council.

95. Economic migration created social and political problems in the developed countries, and the solution to that modern phenomenon lay in greater international cooperation and universal socio-economic development. The problem of economic migration, which was as old as history itself, would not be overcome by building walls around affluent lands.

96. Mr. PETERS (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), speaking on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, expressed appreciation for the support extended to the High Commissioner and her staff.

97. UNHCR intended to enhance its cooperation with other United Nations agencies, Governments and non-governmental organizations, and hoped that those efforts would lead to improvement in the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in refugee emergencies and promote an appropriate division of labour in rehabilitation and reintegration activities. Those efforts were already reflected in such processes as the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) and Partnership in Action and the successful repatriation efforts in Asia, Africa, Central America and the Middle East.

98. Many speakers had drawn attention to the plight of refugee women and children, who made up 80 per cent of the world's refugee population. UNHCR would continue its efforts to ensure that their special protection and assistance needs were taken into account.

99. He welcomed the Committee's understanding that humanitarian assistance efforts were closely linked to peace-keeping and peacemaking activities but must maintain their impartial and non-political character, and agreed that prevention and sustainable repatriation solutions required respect for human rights and economic development.

100. Many speakers had drawn attention to restrictive policies, expressions of xenophobic and racist views and the difficulties of drawing a clear distinction between refugees and economic migrants. UNHCR trusted that it could continue to cooperate closely with Governments in addressing those problems. Another concern related to staff security; the High Commissioner fully shared that concern and would explore all measures to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel.

101. With regard to the challenge faced by internally displaced persons, there was no doubt that some arrangement would have to be worked out by the international community to provide appropriate assistance to the millions of displaced persons who did not fall under the mandate of UNHCR. The international community must also take into account the concerns of those States which received thousands of refugees despite their already fragile economies and develop an equitable means of sharing the burden.

102. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement by the representative of Kuwait to the effect that the Kuwaiti regime had offered assistance to Iraqi refugees was absolutely untrue. It was a well-known fact that the Kuwaiti regime had been spending money not to help refugees, but rather to give bribes, create crises and help continue the blockade against the Iraqi people.

103. Ms. MURUGESAN (India), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that her delegation had not initiated any of the verbal exchanges with the delegation of Pakistan. Pakistan, after invading a part of India's territory, which it called disputed territory, and arming terrorists and sending them to India, shed crocodile tears in the name of human rights when India dealt with terrorism. Pakistan spoke of refugees from India, when in actual fact 250,000 persons from the Kashmir valley had fled to other parts of India to escape terrorism. Pakistan asked for bilateral talks, yet when India offered talks at the highest level, Pakistan imposed conditions. Since there was no need to go on with the list of contradictions in the Pakistani position, she had no intention of asking for the floor again.

104. Mr. AL-SAIF (Kuwait), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that when the representative of Iraq had taken the floor, Kuwait had expected to hear an announcement of the end of the acts of brutality and torture against the Iraqi people, which had led thousands of individuals, including some ambassadors, to flee to neighbouring countries. Instead, Iraq had surprised the Committee with an attack on the countries which were granting assistance to the Iraqi people, including Kuwait. It was a fact that assistance was being granted. Iraq often used chemical weapons and other weapons against its own people, and Kuwait believed that measures should be taken against that oppressive regime.

105. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan had contained not rhetoric but facts: first, refugees had been fleeing Indian-occupied Kashmir since January 1990; second, refugees had been fleeing Indian oppression since 1947-1948 and third, the refugees wished to return to occupied Kashmir to exercise their right to self-determination under the auspices of the United Nations. Those charges were documented. The Indian occupation forces in Jammu and Kashmir must stop the repression.

106. It was not Pakistan that was saying that Kashmir was a disputed territory, but the Security Council. Furthermore, India should not speak of terrorism, since the Indian security forces had engineered the worst kind of terrorism: State terrorism.

107. As for bilateral talks at the highest level, when the Indians spoke in international forums, they referred to such talks, but when they talked to the Pakistanis, they evaded the issue. Conditionalities had to be put forward to ensure that the dialogue was authentic.

108. Ms. BENNANI (Morocco) said that since her delegation could not reserve its right of reply for another meeting of the Committee, it would circulate a document clarifying the issue of the Saharan refugees of Tindouf.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.